WITH INTENT TO DESTROY

Reflecting on Genocide

COLIN TATZ

gen-ō-cide: [gen + -cide] 1: the use of deliberate systematic measures (as killing, bodily or mental injury, unlivable conditions, prevention of births) calculated to bring about the extermination of a racial, political, or cultural group or to destroy the language, religion, or culture of a group; 2: one who advocates or practices genocide.

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In memory of a South African mentor,

Edgar Brookes,

and, in appreciation, this book is for

Yehuda Bauer

CONTENTS

DEFINITIONS OF GENOCIDE

In international law

Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Article III

The following acts shall be punishable:

Genocide;
Conspiracy to commit genocide;
Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;
Complicity in genocide.

The United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948*

Article 6 of the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, effective from 1 July 2002, states that: 'For the purpose of this Statute, "genocide" means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such' and then adds, verbatim, the terms of Article II above.

In the social sciences

Genocide . . . is the destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.

Raphael Lemkin, 1944

Genocide is the deliberate destruction of physical life of individual human beings by reason of their membership of any human collectivity as such.

Pieter Drost, 1959

Genocide is defined as a structural and systematic destruction of innocent people by a state bureaucratic apparatus.

Irving Louis Horowitz, 1976

Genocide is any act that puts the very existence of a group in jeopardy.

Henry Huttenbach, 1988

The concept of genocide applies *only* when there is an actualised intent, however successfully carried out, to physically destroy an entire group (as such a group is defined by the perpetrators).

Steven Katz, 1989

Genocide is the sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.

Helen Fein, 1993

Genocide is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.

Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, 1990

Genocide is the sustained purposive action perpetrated by the state, or actors condoned by the state, on a captured victim group as defined by the perpetrator(s), leading to the physical destruction of the group.

Jennifer Balint, 1991

Genocide in the generic sense means the mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings, when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential defencelessness of the victims.

Israel Charny, 1994

In the dictionaries

Genocide: annihilation of a race.

The Shorter Oxford, 1973

Genocide: extermination of a national or racial group as a planned move.

The Macquarie, 1985

Genocide: 1. the use of deliberate systematic measures (as killing, bodily or mental injury, unlivable conditions, prevention of births) calculated to bring about the extermination of a racial, political, or cultural group or to destroy the language, religion, or culture of a group. 2. one who advocates or practices genocide.

Webster's Third New International, 1971

PROLOGUE

Nations in transition, from colonialism or from a war or from the domination of one tribe over another, need social consensus and ways of feeling good about themselves. Many feel uncomfortable about some, or even much, of their earlier history. They don't want reminders of murder and massacre, let alone of genocide, whether done to them or by them. When they first established their nation states, the two quintessential victim groups of the twentieth century – the Jews and the Armenians – didn't want to know about genocide. They didn't teach that history, as if to demonstrate that they hadn't 'gone as if sheep to the slaughter' and that they were, indeed, nations of virility and valour. Once they had learned that without history there is no present and no future, then both states undertook educational and spiritual journeys into their genocides.

On the culprit side, postwar, democratic, reunified Germany is still weighed down by the *Schuldfrage* (guilt question). Turkey, still struggling to achieve its ninety-five-year-old dream of becoming the beacon of democracy in the Near East, does everything possible to deny its genocide of the Armenians, Assyrians and Pontian Greeks.

But Australia, the United States and Britain are not nations in transition, at least not in the manner of Germany or Turkey. Why then do these nations – especially Australia and the United States – experience paroxysms, ranging from upset to extreme angst to even more extreme anger, when the (literal) spectres of genocide appear as facets of their proudly democratic histories?

Bad history, ugly history, doesn't remain buried for long. In the 1990s, the relatively well-known fates of Native Central and North Americans were systematically researched, collated and presented in books such as David Stannard's *American Holocaust* (1992) and Ward Churchill's *A Little Matter of Genocide* (1998). These works came to prominence in conjunction with an aptly titled Massachusetts text on Holocaust education for high schools, *Facing History and Ourselves*, by William Parsons and Margot Strom (1994).

However, more recently, Samantha Power, in explaining how far outside the American universe of obligation or concern were 'foreign' genocide victim groups and places, managed to avoid entirely the issue of domestic American genocide. In her *New York Review of Books* essay, which preceded her 2002 book, *A Problem from Hell*, she explains American inertia, lack of political will, absence of morality and crass expediency when that major power could have acted in several ways to mitigate, or even halt, the mass killings of Armenians, Jews, Kurds, Bosnians and Rwandans. She demands to know how 'Rwandan Hutus in 1994 could freely, joyfully, and systematically slaughter some eight thousand Tutsi a day for one hundred days without any foreign interference'. She points to the facts that this genocide 'occurred *after* the cold war; *after* the growth of human rights groups; *after* the advent of technology that allowed for instant communication; *after* the erection of the Holocaust Museum on the Mall in Washington DC' (Power 2002, her emphases). She insists that Americans face these facts, but she doesn't even mention their own history of genocide of Native Americans.

Imperial and colonial Britain has a rich reservoir of history. Some of that history is a record of achievement and beneficence; some of it, or even much of it, was appalling in its legacy of societal destruction and its maleficence. Mike Davis's *Late Victorian Holocausts* (2001), for example, is not a conventional colonial history, but he links, in dramatic fashion, the 'New Imperialism' with the catastrophic crop failures of the 1870s and 1890s; these combined to produce a death toll of some 50 million as colonial states, especially Britain, forcibly incorporated millions into their economic and political structures.

In Australia, the new millennium began with an asylum-seeker problem of some magnitude. The asylum-seekers were skilfully confused with would-be terrorists, in an Australia which had never had to confront that

problem. As a means of coercion, terrorism isn't new. But systematic terrorism has arrived in or near countries not inured to it, at least not in the manner of Ireland and Israel. The 'war against terrorism' is now upon us, and the response to it is in part realistic, in part hysterical. The year 2003 began with draconian anti-terrorist legislation in several democracies, and with daily doses of national media campaigns to 'be alert' but not 'alarmed'. The Australian version of this campaign began with the insistence that 'Australians are friendly, decent, democratic people . . . [who] will remain that way'. In times of stress and hysteria, there is impatience, nay, dismissal of anything and everything that stands in the way of patriotic, bellicose fervour.

Yet the 'friendly, decent, democratic people' found a way to place some 1,100 asylum-seekers in remote mainland detention centres, and a similar number 'off-shore' – 'the Pacific solution' – on islands like Nauru. Riots, burnings, suicides, homicides, attacks on warders and a change in the private management firm responsible for these 'systems' have not altered the government's claim that 'detention centres are not jails', notwithstanding their utter remoteness and the razor-wire boundaries, even for the hundred or more detainees classified as children.

The millennium also began with the celebration of the centenary of federation and a dedication to reconciliation with the Aboriginal and Islander peoples. Yet Australians shy away from admitting exactly what it is that has to be reconciled, and why. A middle power, a stable democracy, this 'land of the fair go' and 'the level playing field' insists that its peoples 'move on' – yet steadfastly, obstinately, refuses to acknowledge what it is that they must move on from.

The past is, indeed, a foreign country. So, too, for most white Australians, white Americans and Britons, is genocide. Catastrophes of mass death occur outside their universe of concern in far-off, unpronounceable places like Oswiecim (Auschwitz), Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Majdanek, Phnom Penh, Dhaka, Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Pristina, Goradze, Kigali and Goma. Such people and places are the essence of a remote 'other'. They are simply not relevant to people like us. And, as we will see, if they are or were relevant, it was 'all a long time ago'. Uncomfortably, Indonesia's genocidal practices in East Timor are much closer to Australia in terms of time, geography, national interest, sphere of influence and political relationship.

Over the past forty-two years, I have (as an immigrant) observed the search for an Australian identity of independence, accompanied by the growth of a confident nationalism free of Mother England. I have also seen both movements begin to flag, even crumble, when confronted by increasingly strident Aboriginal assertions and other ethnic challenges to the assimilationist mould. The old shibboleths about 'one people' sharing the same hopes, loyalties, customs and beliefs began to fragment some time ago. Even the Jewish community, once notable for its integration and its pursuit of 'ideological non-distinctiveness' from mainstream Australia, has been re-shaped by an influx of 'foreign' Jews, many of whom are unwilling to surrender their own history for a 'look-only-to-the-future-and-forget-the-past' philosophy.

Genocide is now in the vocabulary of Australian politics, albeit grudgingly, or even hostilely. Whether owing to the frustration attending three Holocaust war crimes trials which ended in acquittal or abortion in Adelaide in the 1990s, or by the coming to light of an Australian awareness, perhaps complicity, in the events of East Timor in the 1970s (and later), or the public's first knowledge of the wholesale removal of Aboriginal children, the dreaded 'g' word is firmly with us. It isn't likely to go away because we wish it so, or because of a crusade to deny it, or at least to exorcise it. The purpose of my university and public courses, and of this book (among others), is to keep it here – not to produce anger, shame, guilt, or some international opprobrium but to prod Australians into facing their history and thus to facilitate a 'moving on', free of the chronic suppuration that arises from suppression.

With Intent to Destroy is an integrated collection of essays about the grave (and gravest) aspects of race politics – in Europe, South Africa and Australia – that have assailed me during four decades as student, researcher, teacher and writer. They are inevitably personal and admittedly selective – I make no claims to radical historical discoveries or to any attempt to cover all potential genocides here – and they reflect my situation as an immigrant, South African, Australian Jew. What they do cover is an evolution (rather than a revolution) in my thinking about racism and the termini to which, regrettably yet inevitably, racist behaviour so often leads.

The book is also an attempt to integrate what have become increasingly separate fields: Holocaust studies and genocide studies. Schism is perhaps

too strong a term, but diverging and divergent paths are assuredly what we have at present. The Holocaust and its literature overwhelm, and there are good and proper reasons why this is so. Scholars of that event should have no reason or need to denigrate comparative genocide studies as somehow trivialising or minimising that *tremendum*. Nor is it valid to assert that the Holocaust agenda is history while the genocide approach is sociology. And there is no need or cause for genocide scholars to ignore, or evade, the lessons and legacies of the Holocaust in their pursuit of other case histories.

The first chapter relates the breaking of a protective membrane around me, allowing in that darkness which I see, and which others see, as the nature of the Holocaust. It is a highly personal journey, evoking many long-suppressed memories and influences of a murderous and spiteful South Africa, especially during World War II. Those years, and the post-1948 'invigoration' of an apartheid that had long been there in harsh practice, explain my mainsprings and my lifelong interest in race politics.

The second chapter offers an approach to the study of genocide through the event which for most Westerners, at least, remains the paradigm case study – the Holocaust, or *Shoah*, or *Churban*, or Judeocide. It is, in many ways, the result of instruction over several years at Yad Vashem (The Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority) in Jerusalem, where I was truly confronted by the Holocaust, by its explicability and its inexplicability, and by Yehuda Bauer's presentation of its dialectical contradictions. The conclusions I have reached as a result of that confrontation are presented as a set of 'thoughts', springboards for further consideration, on the historical, philosophical, religious and psychological aspects of the Holocaust.

An attempt to understand something of the 'anatomy' of genocides – their origins, ideological bases, socio-political contexts, the techniques and technologies used, precedented and unprecedented aspects – gives rise to the case-study chapters which follow and which focus primarily on Germany, Australia and South Africa. They each illustrate important aspects of the study of genocide: the structural process in the case of Germany, whereby antisemitism was transformed into an industrialised engine of genocide; the matters of definition and interpretation in the case of Australia; and the question in South Africa of whether or not the apartheid regime can be described as genocidal.

These chapters are followed by some reflections on responses to genocide, both official and not so official – a seeming inability or refusal on the

part of the Turkish authorities, for instance, to concede the Armenian genocidal massacres, the denialism[1] which has featured so strongly in Australia and which continues to be raised in respect of the Holocaust, and the vogue for apology as a way of 'laying things to rest'.

A concluding chapter discusses why and how both the narratives and the analyses of various genocides might be disseminated. Teaching about such calamities is hardly fun but it isn't all that difficult. Rather, what is disturbing is the reluctance of curriculum-setting people, in schools and universities, to take the subject on board. I reflect on genocide, and on both the exhilaration and the pain involved in thinking about it, writing about it, and teaching it.